

Oceana Philippines: Rebuilding Fisheries and Transforming Management Policies

Three years since its office was established under the Vibrant Oceans Initiative (VOI) of Bloomberg Philanthropies, Oceana Philippines has been helping forged effective partnerships to promote stronger collaboration among national government agencies, local government units, civil society organizations, coastal communities and other stakeholders to restore fisheries abundance in the country. Through specific and time-bound campaign goals, Oceana is proving to be an effective agent for sustainable fisheries management in the Philippines, as shown by some of the milestones garnered under its campaigns.

End Commercial Fishing in Tañon Strait



Tañon Strait is one of the largest protected seascapes in the Philippines, established almost 20 years ago. The policy-making body, the Protected Area Management Board (PAMB) of the Protected Seascape, was convened in 2015 with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Cebu Province, Oceana, and its VOI partner, Rare, and Phil Earth Justice Center (PEJC) as co-organizers.

To strengthen law enforcement and deter illegal fishing especially the intrusion of commercial fishers in municipal waters and protected areas, Oceana assisted in bringing together key national agencies such as the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR), Department of Environment and Natural Resources – Biodiversity Management Bureau (BMB) and the Department of Interior and Local Government Department, to strengthen their collaboration in management and enforcement of fisheries and environmental laws; helped revitalize the Coastal Law Enforcement Alliance in Region 7; established policy dialogues on fisheries management and enforcement with the Department of Interior and Local Government, BFAR and key partners from the public sector and civil society. Oceana also worked with the DENR-BMB and the Department of Justice (DOJ) to appoint special prosecutors in protected areas, and designate one in Tañon Strait, a first for a protected area, to handle cases of violations of fisheries and environmental laws.

Today the Strait has an active PAMB, Executive Committee and Site Management Units, an approved General Management Plan that includes an enforcement plan which is now being implemented by partner government agencies and local governments.

Improved and collaborative enforcement activities, seaborne patrol operations and prosecution of environmental law violations have led to an increase in fish catch and decrease in illegal commercial fishing.

Institutionalize Vessel Monitoring Mechanisms



Among the strong amendments of the Fisheries Code (RA 10654) is the requirement of Vessel Monitoring Measures (VMM) for all Philippine-flagged commercial fishing vessels. In full support of institutionalizing its use, the Oceana helps popularize vessel monitoring by conducting pilot-testing of the technology in Tañon Strait and other major fishing grounds in the Visayan and Mindanao regions. The Tañon Strait management body is the first protected seascape to require vessel monitoring for all commercial fishing

vessels docking and transiting in the protected area. Draft rules on vessel monitoring were the subject of public consultation led by the BFAR in various parts of the country.

Protect Sardine Fisheries



Through the leadership of BFAR, Oceana, scientists and academic institutions, a science-based approach to the management of the country's sardine stocks is being crafted. Management workshops are coordinated to set Reference Points and Harvest Control Rules for Fisheries Management Areas.

Local government units, scientists, academic institutions, Oceana and civil society partners are working with BFAR in piloting the Visayan Sea, an important area for sardine fishery, as a fisheries managed area. Currently, it is the only major fishing ground in the country working on science-based Reference Points and Harvest Control Rules. Governors of the provinces of Iloilo, Negros Occidental, Cebu have signed a Memorandum of Cooperation with the BFAR to protect the Visayan Sea.

Protect Benham Bank Seafloor Habitat



In 2016, Oceana joined the government-led expedition to Benham Bank, which is perhaps the only area in the Philippines which has 100% coral cover. Oceana partners with the BMB, government agencies, lawmakers, private sector and non-government organizations to ensure that adequate measures are taken to protect the biological resources of the pristine Benham Bank and adjacent areas, while ensuring that consultative science-based policies are crafted as part of a broader management plan for the region.

Ban Destructive Fishing Gears



Philippine fisheries are challenged not just with the problems of overfishing but also with the use of environmentally-destructive fishing methods such as blast fishing and bottom trawling. Bottom trawling causes disturbance to seabed ecosystems and habitats and its catch often consists of juvenile fishes. Oceana has crafted a policy brief on bottom trawling and its impact both through the lens of natural ecosystems and socio-economic realities as a basis for the policy call for government to implement the ban on bottom trawling. See link, <http://ph.oceana.org/publications/reports/policy-brief-bottom-trawling-philippines#>

[bottom-trawling-philippines#](http://ph.oceana.org/publications/reports/policy-brief-bottom-trawling-philippines#)

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